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STARRY FLAG WEEKLY

THRILLING STORIES OF OUR VICTORIOUS ARMY

TAMPA'S DYNAMITE FIEND

OR LIEUTENANT MAYNARD'S
SECRET SERVICE EXPLOIT



BY
DOUGLAS WELLS

HAL'S HORRIFIED EYES TOOK IN THE WHOLE SCENE.

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Starry Flag Weekly

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TAMPA'S DYNAMITE FIEND;

OR,

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By DOUGLAS WELLS.

First Part.

CHAPTER I.

HAL'S TAMPA DETAIL.

"There is one class of fellows here I am sorry for."

"What class?"

"The young West Pointers, who have just been sent to join the army. Poor boys! They are full of life, hope and ambition. They swarm here in Tampa. No soldiers in the service prouder than they! None more anxious than they to do their duty under the Flag! Yet in a few weeks, perhaps in a few days, after the first fight comes off, scores of them will be lying dead on the field. Their first battle will be a glorious affair for them. It will also be the final tragedy of their lives!"

"But that is what boys go to West Point for."

"I know it, but that does not make the prospect less pitiful."

The speakers were two men who sat on one of the verandas of the Tampa Bay Hotel, at Tampa, Florida, smoking indolently through the droning hour before noon.

They were citizens, men who had come down from Northern States as spectators

in the greatest, most bustling military camp Uncle Sam has established since the days of '65.

Despite the fact that this hour belonged to the "siesta" portion of the day, when people who know the climate best refrain from all exertion, the big hotel and its handsome grounds presented a scene of bustling activity.

It was the headquarters, this hotel, of Generals Shafter and Lee.

People lounged in the lobby just inside, hoping to get a glimpse of General Shafter, who had been a commander in many brilliant Indian campaigns, or a look at Fitzhugh Lee, the hero of Havana.

A few army officers, off duty, lounged in the lobby, or on the wide verandas, but by far the most of the officers were flying about, despite the heat, on one pressing duty or another.

Out beyond the veranda were picketed a score of horses, some in the white-faced trimmings which indicated that they belonged to field or staff officers of the infantry; other saddle cloths bore the yellow border of the cavalry, while not a few scarlet trimmings proclaimed the mounts of artillery officers.

Inside the hotel, up on the next floor

rooms teemed with officers and non-commissioned officers who were performing the numerous and onerous duties incident to a campaign of which the average civilian knows nothing.

Every few moments an officer would depart on one of the horses, but other officers, bringing reports or seeking instructions, galloped up, thus keeping the scene of activity undiminished.

"You think the West Point boys are more to be pitied than the volunteers who have thrown up everything dear to them to get under the flag and do their duty?" asked one of the two men before mentioned.

"Certainly not," came the slow reply. "But I suppose it is natural to feel more attraction to the West Pointers, since they are the very pick and cream of the youth of the country. By Jove, here comes one now. A veritable boy, too, despite his shoulder straps. Doesn't it seem too bad to think of that poor boy, who has never seen anything worse than a sham battle, going on to a field where thousands of bullets are passing every moment?"

"If he is thinking of the prospect, it evidently isn't worrying him," laughed the other man. "At a guess, I should say he was perfectly happy at this moment."

The young officer referred to was pacing slowly along one of the walks that led to the veranda. He certainly was boyish in looks, yet just as certainly he was a thorough soldier.

Erect in carriage, perfectly "set up," a splendid physical specimen of early manhood, he gave the impression of being a trooper who could be depended upon in any emergency.

For a trooper he was, as his yellow trousers stripe and yellow shoulder straps showed him to be a second lieutenant of cavalry.

He belonged to the "regulars," too, as amply evidenced by the letters "U. S."

beside the crossed sabres on the collar of his blouse.

"I should like to know what his sensations will be," said the man who took a morbid view of war, "when he gets into his first fight."

"Pardon me," interposed a third man, who sat behind the pair, "but the young officer whom you are discussing can already answer that question for you."

"You don't mean——"

"I mean, gentlemen, that he has already seen service. The officer whom you are discussing served first with the Cuban troops down on the island. He was afterward commissioned a second lieutenant in the United States army, and sent to Cuba with a squad of men. He had orders to go to General Gomez, I believe, on some mission. That mission, I understand, was entirely successful, and the young gentleman has received nothing but praise ever since he returned to the borders of United States soil."

"Who is he?"

"Lieutenant Hal Maynard."

"A West Pointer?"

"Never saw West Point, I am told. He was commissioned on account of his actual fighting experience, and his knowledge of Cuba and the Cubans. He came in on the steamer *Mascotte* from Key West last night. Some other army officers aboard were telling me about Maynard's work. They pronounce him a wonder, and expect great things of him."

While this conversation was going on in low tones, the subject of the remarks had passed up the steps, across the veranda and into the lobby of the hotel.

It was our same old friend, Hal Maynard, than whom no United States officer had won a more brilliant record at the opening of the war with Spain.

The evening before he had reached Tampa, and was now awaiting orders from the War Department.

So far, he was unattached; that is,

while an officer of United States cavalry, he had as yet been appointed to no regiment, nor to staff duty.

"Anything for me?" queried the young officer, approaching the desk of the room-clerk.

"A telegram, Mr. Maynard. Came ten minutes ago."

Hal tore open the envelope, and read this dispatch:

"Report at once to Colonel Westinghouse, Tampa Bay Hotel. Take his orders until otherwise detailed."

"Alger, Secretary of War."

"Work cut out for me at once. Good!" smiled Hal.

Then a troubled cloud appeared on his face.

"Westinghouse," he muttered. "Confound it, he's chief of commissary. Am I to be put to work serving out rations?"

This offered a most discouraging prospect to a young officer who longed to do some of the fighting.

"Hold on, though!" he exclaimed, his face lighting up. It's Colonel Weston who's chief of commissary. Westinghouse may have better work for me. I'll soon end this suspense."

Stepping to the desk, he wrote his name on a card, saw it dispatched to the floor above by a colored servant, and was not kept waiting over a minute before he was informed that Colonel Westinghouse would see him at once.

Sixty seconds later our hero stood in that colonel's presence.

"Take a seat, Maynard," invited the colonel after shaking hands with him. You're ready for instant work, I hope?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. I like your emphasis. It speaks for zeal. Now Maynard," and Colonel Westinghouse lowered his voice, "you must understand that I am an army officer detailed to assist the secret service."

"The secret service, sir?"

"Yes; and you are detailed to take my

orders in that line of work. Try it for a few days; if I find you unfitted for the work, or if you find it distasteful to you, I'll try to have the detail changed. Are you satisfied with that promise?"

"I am satisfied, sir, to do my duty wherever I find it."

"Very well; as is pretty generally known, we have arrested several Spanish spies here in Tampa. The peculiar fact is that, when we nab one, two more seem to spring up in his place. That is why the army is called in to aid the secret service. That is why I have been detached from staff duty to play the detective. Maynard, we have the most urgent instructions from Washington to break up these spies by arresting the last one to be found in Tampa. Now listen to my explanation of what we already know and suspect."

Thereupon the colonel plunged into a discourse that made Lieutenant Hal open his eyes wider and wider as fact after fact was unfolded and a whole long string of suspicions stated.

"This is dangerous work, Maynard," wound up the colonel.

"That doesn't dismay me, sir."

"You are not the only officer whom I am calling upon for help, but it is not necessary, at present, for you to know who the others are. Now, you may be sure that the first thing for you to do is to get out of your uniform. Do not associate with army officers here, for the present, any more than is necessary, for the more incog. you keep yourself the better you will succeed. Here is an order on a clothing dealer who will supply you with whatever you call for. Uncle Sam will pay the bills, so do not be too niggardly in picking your outfit. You will need several suits. Now go."

"When shall I report back, sir?"

"Not until I send for you, but keep about the hotel or the grounds."

"Yes, sir."

With a salute, Lieutenant Hal left the room.

Taking a trolley car at the entrance to the hotel grounds, he was speedily over in the business part of Tampa.

A half an hour later Hal Maynard quitted the clothier's store.

He now wore the coolest-looking suit of white duck that could be found in Tampa, with white canvas shoes and a jaunty straw hat.

Like many of the local swells, he affected a light fan of Florida palmetto.

Behind, in the store, the clerk was busily engaged in wrapping up several packages to be delivered to young Maynard at the hotel.

Lieutenant Hal, in his civilian attire, looked like an entirely different young man as he sauntered back into the hotel.

Those who had taken but a passing glimpse at the young lieutenant would be hardly likely to recognize him now in his changed apparel.

Yet there was one who recognized Hal, a stranger to our hero at that.

"Mr. Maynard," hailed the stranger, tapping the boy on the shoulder, "there is a young lady here who has asked me to present you to her. She is a stranger, but she sends you the talismanic name of Juan Ramirez."

"Ramirez!" echoed Hal. "Then, indeed, I shall be glad to meet her."

"She is the Senorita Evalina Porrero, a cousin to Ramirez. That is she sitting over there in the corner."

A moment later Hal was bowing before a most bewitching dusky beauty.

CHAPTER II.

IN DISGRACE.

"You must pardon me, Senor Maynard, but I could not resist the temptation to ask for an introduction to you."

Thus spoke the little beauty, with a trace of Cuban accent that captivated Hal.

"The gentleman who came to me mentioned the name of Ramirez," suggested Hal.

"Yes, senor; the name of Juan Ramirez, who is my cousin. It was mainly on account of what Juan has written me of you that made me eager to meet you. Such a hero, such a prodigy as he describes you to be. I have saved both letters, senor, and I shall show them to you."

"Don't, if you please," begged Hal, with mock gravity. "Juan has always tried so desperately to flatter me that I shall grow too vain to be of any use if you show me his letters. Nevertheless I am, for once, delighted with Juan's extravagant praise, since it has procured for me the pleasure of meeting you."

"If you have an hour or two of time to spare, senor, I shall claim it, on Juan's account."

"As much of my leisure as you will accept is at your disposal," was the young lieutenant's gallant response. "On Juan's account if you wish it, but why not on your own account?"

And Hal, who had been denied charming feminine company for many weeks, gazed at the little beauty so ardently that the senorita flushed, though she did not appear displeased.

"Your mother is here?" Maynard went on.

"No, senor; I have no mother, but am here under the chaperonage of a married cousin. However, she is away, up in Jacksonville on a visit."

"Then perhaps, senorita, I may invite you to dine with me now, if that meets with your pleasure. I am liable to be called away at any time."

"I shall be delighted with your protection, senor," responded the Senorita Porrero, rising. "Though I have never met you before, I have heard so much enthusiastic praise of you from Juan that I feel, senor, as if we were old friends."

Hal escorted her into the dining-room with a feeling that he had fallen in clover.

It is natural for an impressionable youngster to take keen delight in being the escort of a girl who attracts the greatest attention by her beauty.

"Juan has told me," chattered on Evalina, "how you and he left Havana together to join the insurgents, and how you each rose to famous positions. He has described to me some of the battles in which you both took part. He has told me, also, how you came to enter the American service, though I have not received a recent enough letter from him to know what your recent mission in Cuba was."

As our hero's recent trip to Cuba was of a strictly confidential nature, he did not feel at liberty to enlighten the señorita, but he muttered to himself:

"I shall certainly quarrel with Juan. These Cubans all have rafts of relatives—too many to mention, but he might at least have described this charming cousin to me. To be fair, though, he did not know, when I left him, that I was coming to Tampa."

Hal described as much of Juan's recent adventures as could be told without violating confidences, and the señorita, when she heard of her cousin's promotion to a captaincy, clapped her hands with glee.

"He is a brave fellow, señor. I shall be disappointed if he comes through the war with anything less than the rank of colonel."

"If the war lasts four or five months," Hal assured her, "I am willing to swear that Juan will be a brigadier."

It gave Hal such pleasure to see the señorita flush with delight that he added positively:

"And if the war lasts six months, señorita, he will become at least a major general."

Evalina's face glowing more than before, he added:

"And when peace is declared he will certainly be offered a place in Cuba's cabinet."

"Ah, now, you are poking fun at me, señor," pouted the pretty Cuban.

"Upon my word, señorita, I am not."

"Then you have no longer any right to accuse Juan of flattering you, when you so greatly exceed him in your prophecies."

"He is one of the best and cleverest fellows in christendom, señorita," pronounced Hal, and he meant it.

All too soon the dinner was over.

Just as Hal was about to ask the señorita for the signal to rise, a servant approached and slipped a card into our hero's hand.

It bore this inscription:

"Report to me at once. Westinghouse."

"Señorita," said Hal, in a voice of genuine regret, "I must soon take my leave of you for a little while."

"If you have some other appointment, señor—"

"Rest assured that nothing but duty could draw me away from you. Will you permit me to escort you to the parlor before taking leave of you?"

Evalina nodding assent, our hero conducted her to the parlor, which was also the office and lobby of the hotel.

Having seen her seated, and making one of his best bows, Maynard hurried off to find the colonel.

That officer was seated at a table in his own room.

"I am sorry to disturb you, Maynard, if you had anything pleasant on hand," began Westinghouse, courteously. "To tell the truth, the business I have on hand for you is not as difficult as you may have expected, but it is important, nevertheless, and I would not care to intrust it to any one less than officer. This sealed envelope and its contents I wish you to deliver personally to Lieutenant

Colonel Randolph, who is in command of the light artillery brigade over at Port Tampa. His reply will probably be a verbal one, but whatever instructions he has to give after reading the papers you will observe."

"Yes, sir. Any other orders, colonel?"

"None, except to be very careful not to lose the papers."

"I shall be careful, sir."

With a salute Maynard left the room.

It did not occur to him to grumble inwardly because he was being used only as a messenger. He was on duty, to carry out the simplest or the greatest orders that came his way. Of such stuff are all good soldiers made.

"You are leaving the hotel, senor?" called a soft voice, as our hero went through the lobby.

It was Evalina, who had changed her seat while he was up stairs.

"I shall be gone for a little while, senorita," he replied, bowing, and would have passed on had not the little beauty jumped up in his way.

"Just one moment, senor," she laughed, bewitchingly. "Your necktie looks almost disreputable. Either you tied it carelessly, or it has become disarranged. Let me retie it for you."

Willingly enough, Maynard stopped, while the pretty Cuban girl began to arrange the tie more to her own satisfaction.

"You are looking down," she pouted, pausing.

"At you, senorita," responded the gallant young lieutenant. "I cannot help it."

"That was very nicely said, senor, but there is a time for compliments, just as there is a time for friendly services. If I am to arrange your tie in a way that will satisfy myself, you must throw your head back so that your chin will not be in the way."

Smiling, Hal complied.

A few deft tugs, and the senorita announced:

"There, now, senor, your tie is adjusted as a Christian's should be."

"For which I thank you, senorita, a thousand times."

Senorita Porrero smiled captivately, then dropped back into her seat.

There was no time to be lost, as the train to Port Tampa was already waiting in the hotel grounds.

Therefore, our hero was obliged to step briskly out upon the veranda.

As he did so, a man bumped into him.

Hal's first impression was that the stranger had been pushed against him by some careless person, until, looking down at his coat pocket, our hero felt a thrill of alarm.

The envelope containing the papers was gone!

"I beg your pardon, sir," began the man who had bumped against him, but the apology was cut short.

With the sudden savagery of an aroused beast, Maynard grabbed at the fellow.

"Give me back that envelope," he panted.

"What envelope?" stammered the stranger.

"You know well what I mean," retorted Hal, sternly, though in a low voice.

"Upon my word, sir, I don't."

"No evasion! Either return it, or——"

"Are you crazy?" demanded the stranger.

"If you don't return it, I shall regret even more than you what must follow," spoke Maynard, quietly.

"But I——"

Looking up, Hal caught sight of an officer whom he had been introduced to that morning.

A nod from our hero brought the officer to his side.

"Comrade," murmured Hal, "I am

obliged to ask this man some serious questions. Do you mind accompanying us?"

By this time the stranger had turned very pale. He was shaking, though he still protested in a low tone:

"Gentlemen, I don't know what you mean."

But, Hal's brother officer nodding, our hero answered:

"If you don't want to create a scene, walk quietly between us. We may not detain you long."

Still shaking, the fellow complied without another word.

They took him to a room on the next floor, searched him, but failed to find the envelope.

By this time much of the stranger's assurance had returned to him.

"This is an outrage," he cried, hotly.

"Perhaps," rejoined Hal, coolly. "If it should turn out so, you will receive ample apologies. But, sir, what did you do with the envelope?"

Hal fired this question rapidly, hoping to catch the man off his guard.

He hardly succeeded, however, for he was met with the jeering response:

"Guess!"

"That's enough!" vented Maynard. "We will take plenty of time, then, to attend to your case."

"But what is the meaning of——"

"Explanations later," rejoined our hero, coldly. "For the present, we shall have to detain you under arrest. Will you, sir," turning to his brother officer, "oblige me by looking after this man's proper detention, while I go to make my report?"

His brother officer nodding, Maynard hurried off to Colonel Westinghouse's room.

It was with a keen sense of humiliation that Lieutenant Maynard told his superior what had happened.

"So you have bungled—failed at the outset?" cried the colonel, sternly. "That is quite enough, lieutenant. You may consider yourself relieved until further orders. I will send for you when I have anything to say to you."

Flushing at first, then deathly pale, Hal Maynard left the room.

In disgrace!

CHAPTER III.

THE RUSE THAT WORKED.

For the first half dozen steps down the hotel corridor Lieutenant Hal walked as unsteadily as a drunken man.

"Pull yourself together, old chap," he muttered. "Colonel Westinghouse is too hasty to be just."

At the head of the stairs Hal halted.

"The colonel is all right," he decided, suddenly. "He isn't unduly severe. I deserve more than he said. Great Scot! If every officer in Uncle Sam's service should lose his grip on duty the way I did, what would become of the army?"

Slowly, thoughtfully, Maynard retraced the way to his own room.

"I've got to think—think right," he cogitated. "Then I've got to act—act quickly and vigorously."

Reflection brought little comfort. Hal's face was whiter than ever as he sank into a chair and stared moodily, first at the ceiling and then at the floor.

"Disgraced on my first detail on American soil," he groaned. "What could that rascal have done with the envelope? He hadn't an instant's time to destroy it. Could he have passed it to a confederate? I hardly see how it was possible."

Then Hal's thoughts took on a desperate turn.

"I was happy in the army," he moaned. "Thought it was just the life for me—that I was cut out for the work. And now—what an ass I've made of my-

self! But I'll retrieve myself. I'll prove that I'm worthy to be trusted with my sword and shoulder straps, or else——”

He paused a moment before he could bring himself to make the galling resolve.

“I'll retrieve myself, or I'll resign from the army, and go back to clerking, where I seem to belong!”

Then came the query to his mind:

“Did the spy we caught really have a confederate? Now, if I could catch that confederate, too!”

An idea popping into his mind, Maynard sprang up, crossed the room quickly, and began to rummage through his valise. He found there a half a dozen long envelopes, similar to the one that had been stolen from him.

Hastily seating himself at the table, Hal addressed one of the envelopes to Lieutenant Colonel Randolph.

“We'll see if I can get this stolen, too,” grimly reflected the young man, as he filled the envelope with blank paper and sealed the flap down.

Placing it in his inside pocket, Maynard rose and quitted the room.

Out in the corridor he encountered Lieutenant Gorman, an infantry officer whom he had met the first hour after his arrival at the hotel.

“Mr. Gorman,” quivered Hal, stepping up to his brother officer, “have you anything to do for the next half hour?”

“Nothing, my dear boy. What is it to be—billiards?”

But Hal's white, anxious face caused Gorman to quickly understand that something was wrong.

“You're in trouble, my boy?”

“The greatest possible, I fear,” whispered Hal, wretchedly.

“Anything I can do—command me.”

“Sh!” warned Hal. “After my late experiences I don't know where there are listening ears.”

“Eh?” muttered Gorman, looking keenly at the boy's face.

“See here, old man, I want to have an impression get noised around the hotel that I've got important papers in my pocket. It's three-quarters of an hour before the next train starts for Port Tampa. Before that time I want to have these papers”—tapping the envelope—“stolen from me.”

All of which caused Mr. Gorman to look at him in unaffected amazement.

“I don't know whether or not I'm beginning to understand,” confessed the infantry officer. “Do you want me to steal that envelope from you? Because if you do, all you've got to do is to turn and look over your shoulder for a couple of instants.”

Despite his wretchedness, Hal could not repress a slight smile at this generous offer.

“Not quite that,” he replied. “Meet me down in the office when I give you a sign. Ask me if it is true that I've got papers relating to the invasion of Cuba by the army? I'll answer you. Talk back on the cue I give you. Don't be too particular not to be overheard. It is my desire to have some eavesdropper overhear you, and try to steal these papers from me.”

Hal's motive was not much clearer in Mr. Gorman's mind, but he at least understood what was wanted of him.

“I'll do it, my boy,” he promised, laying a hand on Maynard's shoulder. “I'm off now, Maynard. You'll find me in the lobby, ready to begin when you show up.”

“I thank you, old fellow,” declared Hal, earnestly. “If you ever need a service, I'll be glad to——”

“Steal papers from me in turn?” quizzed Gorman.

“That, or anything else,” was Maynard's gay answer, for now he was beginning to recover his spirits.

“I'm off. When you fire the first gun, Maynard, I'll be ready with a whole volley.”

And Gorman walked rapidly down the corridor.

Two minutes later Lieutenant Hal entered the office.

There were more than a hundred persons present, for, as has already been said, the Tampa Bay's office partook also of the nature of a parlor and lobby.

Hal strolled slowly toward one of the groups, where a man in the uniform of a Cuban officer was declaiming excitedly to a group of other dark-skinned people.

There were correspondents, a sprinkling of women, two or three American officers, and others standing on the outskirts of the group.

As Hal neared these people, he replaced his straw hat on his head, almost immediately taking it off again, and then looking about him.

Gorman, hovering near by, understood this to be the signal.

Pretending to catch sight of our hero for the first time, the infantry officer hurried up with outstretched hand, exclaiming:

"My dear Maynard, I'm glad to see you. I've heard something that has filled me with excitement. I want to ask you if it's true!"

"What have you heard?" came from Hal.

"About the invasion of Cuba?"

"Well?"

"I have heard that you know something official about it."

"Perhaps I do," rejoined Hal, with a mysterious air."

"Don't keep me on tenterhooks," begged Gorman, in a lower tone, though loud enough for those who stood nearest to hear.

"I'll tell you all I know, old chap," went on Hal, dropping his voice to the same pitch as his comrades. "Orders of some kind have come from Washington, I believe. What those orders are I don't know. It's provoking, too, Gorman, for

I'm mighty close to the orders. In fact," looking down at the envelope, one end of which showed from his inside coat pocket, "I believe I have a copy of the orders right here. They're not for my eyes, however. All I have to do with them is to deliver them to a commanding officer at Port Tampa."

"And you can't give me a hint?" asked the lieutenant, in pretended disappointment.

"Not so much as a syllable, Gorman. I'd like to be obliging, but I tell you frankly that all I know is that the papers in my pocket speak for themselves."

"Too bad," sighed Gorman. "But come out on the veranda. I want to light a cigar."

Had the infantry officer known the whole game, he could not have acted his part better.

Hal was delighted.

"How did I do it?" whispered Gorman, as they stepped out on the veranda.

"Excellently. I fancy the bait has taken, too."

For Hal's quick eye had noted that, among those who now came out on the verands, there were two or three of the dark-skinned men who must have heard what was said.

"Well, I've got to keep near the desk to be on the lookout for one of the fellows whom I expect over from the camp. So I won't stop out here to smoke, after all. Come up to camp, Maynard, when you get a chance. Maybe our mess is slow, but we'll do the best possible to make it lively the day you come out."

"Thank you; I'll be sure to come out as soon as I can."

"I shall contrive to keep my eye on you," whispered Gorman, at parting.

Again looking at his watch, as if to see how much time he had left before train time, Hal dropped into a chair, half-closing his eyes.

Five minutes later there was but one of the dark-skinned men within view.

"Wonder if he is the fish I'm trying to land," mused the boy.

He took out the envelope, glanced at the superscription, and then replaced the packet in his pocket.

"Time to go out on the other veranda and wait for the train," he mused, only half aloud, but he felt sure that his suspect overheard him.

Sauntering past the fellow, without looking at him, Maynard re-entered the hotel, passing slowly through the office.

A third of the way through, he heard a quick step behind him.

"Senor, I beg your pardon," interrupted a voice.

Hal made a half turn, finding himself looking into the face of his suspect.

"Senor," cried the stranger, "I am a stranger here, but a devout Cuban. I am interested in all of your heroes. Can you tell me if the officer over there is General Shafter?"

Still keeping his hand on the young lieutenant's shoulder, the self-assured Cuban pointed in a direction that forced our hero to look backward over his shoulder.

"No, sir," answered Hal, promptly, "that is not Shafter. By his shoulder-straps, he appears to be only a major."

"Senor, I thank you."

"Not at all; you are more than welcome."

As the stranger turned away, Hal glanced swiftly at his inside coat pocket.

It was empty.

"Snared my fish, and got him on a hook!" thrilled Maynard.

One of his hands flew inside his vest as he sprang after the self-styled Cuban.

"Fellow," he whispered, "I don't want any scene, but my hand is resting on the butt of my revolver. Come quietly with me, and I shall not harm you.

Resist, and I swear to blow your brains out on the spot!"

"Senor," rejoined the other, in a tremulous whisper, "I don't understand you."

"You will, mighty quick," came the vehement retort, "if you don't obey every order I give you. I don't want to make trouble here, but, if I have to, I'll blow the whole top of your head off in a twinkling of time."

As Hal stood with his hand resting on his concealed revolver, the muzzle of the weapon stood sharply outlined against the lower edge of his vest.

"Do you surrender?" breathed Hal, menacingly.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SENORITA'S WARNING.

"By what right?" asked the stranger, in a trembling murmur.

"By the right of six cartridges in a weapon that never missed fire," came the tense answer. "By the power of life and death over you."

Still hesitating, the stranger glanced searchingly into the young lieutenant's eyes.

He must have read the certain promise of death there, in those dangerous blue eyes, now changed to a cold, steely gray.

"You appear to have the best of it, senor. I must consent to go with you."

"Very good. And you must take great care not to move either of your hands if you would keep the top of your head where it belongs."

They moved away together. Hal, playing a desperate game for his commission and reputation, had never been more vigilant in his life.

The stranger must have felt that vigilance; he must have realized how quickly the young lieutenant would fulfill his threats of death.

Utterly cowed, Hal's prisoner stepped like one lost in a dream.

They gained the stairway, ascended it, went along the corridor, and, so quietly had the arrest been made that none of the scores of people within sight appeared to have comprehended the fact that an arrest had been made in their midst.

"Here is my room," said Hal, shortly, as he halted before the door and threw it open for the other to enter.

Once inside, the young lieutenant crisply commanded:

"Step over there to the wall. Throw up your hands, and keep them up, or—"

Hal rounded out his sentence by drawing his revolver out into plain sight.

"Senor," quivered the other, "may I now ask what your strange conduct means."

"Ask nothing," was the acrid retort. "It is you who must furnish all the explanations. Take my advice, and don't speak except when you're spoken to."

Rap-tap! came a summons on the door.

Into the stranger's eyes there darted a look of hope.

"Be mighty careful what you try to do now, fellow," warned our hero, next adding, in a louder voice:

"Come in!"

As the door opened, Gorman's face showed in the opening.

"Come in—run in!" cried Hal, joyously.

"You appear to be engaged," suggested the infantry officer, ingenuously.

"Not so much so but that I am glad to see you. Will you lock the door, please?"

A task which Gorman at once performed, after which he came over to Hal, saying:

"I have something to tell you when you have time to listen."

"Say it in a whisper, then, for I have not much confidence in the gentleman

yonder who is studying the muzzle of my revolver."

Gorman came close up to our hero, whispering:

"Good! You are playing your part excellently, Maynard. I came in to tell you that I saw you make the arrest. I took that as my cue to trail after you to note whether you were being followed by any of this rascal's comrades. You were not. I am positive, for I have had my eyes wide open ever since I saw him take that envelope from your pocket."

"You saw him do it?"

"Certainly."

"Our case against him will be complete, then."

All the while our hero kept his gaze unceasingly on the prisoner.

That worthy, seeing that he was so closely watched, did not dare to lower his hands or stir from his position.

"My dear fellow," begged Hal, "will you go to Colonel Westinghouse's room, and ask him to come here. I dare not take my eyes from this rascal until I am relieved of his care."

"I'll go with pleasure," was Gorman's answer.

It was only two or three minutes later that he returned with the colonel.

"A spy, eh?" demanded Westinghouse.

"Yes, sir, was Hal's unhesitating response.

"Gorman," directed the colonel, "be good enough to search the fellow."

"Anything dubious about that?" chuckled the infantry officer, as, plunging his hand at once into the prisoner's inner coat pocket, he drew out a sealed envelope.

"The dummy package that I addressed myself," declared Hal.

Gorman's hands ran up and down over the person of the spy with the certainty of one who has had experience in searching.

"Here," he chuckled, bringing an-

other envelope to light, "is something else."

"The envelope that I addressed and entrusted to Maynard," asserted Colonel Westinghouse.

One more find was brought to light—a paper covered with rough drawings.

"A plan showing the heavy artillery guns at Port Tampa," snorted Westinghouse. "Thus the last doubt disappears that the scoundrel is a spy. Mr. Gorman, be good enough to have the fellow taken off to close confinement. Give my orders that he is to have every stitch of clothing stripped from him and examined. See to it that he has no chance, on the way, to destroy anything."

"Gentlemen," gasped the swarthy one, "let me assure you, on my most solemn oath, that you have made a mistake. Though the appearances may be against me, I can explain everything."

"There'll be a chance given you to explain," was Westinghouse's grim rejoinder. "Doubtless you'll do better at it, too, if you take plenty of time to think over what you're to say. Take him away, Mr. Gorman."

As the door closed, the colonel turned to our hero.

"You do not doubt that he is a spy, sir?" queried Hal.

"Not a doubt in the world. But how did you come to catch him, Maynard? Gorman was able to give me only an inkling to your trick."

Hal detailed the story as concisely as he could.

"Splendidly done," was the quiet praise that brought a flush of pleasure to the boy's face.

"But the envelope you entrusted to me, sir, has been opened. That must mean that the Spaniards already know the contents of the papers."

"Let me see if they are intact," mused the colonel, taking out the sheets in the envelope, and glancing rapidly over them.

"All O. K.," announced Westinghouse. "May the knowledge which the Spaniards obtained by the theft do them much good!"

And he held out the pages before Hal's eyes.

"Blank paper?" cried the boy, starting back, aghast. "Then the enemy already have the real papers!"

"These are the real papers," chuckled Westinghouse. "The same blank papers that I put in the envelope I gave you."

At this queer information Hal looked so utterly bewildered that the colonel laughingly added:

"Maynard, I am as great a believer in bogus dispatches as you are. I wanted to make sure whether there were any spies loitering about this hotel. Hence I supplied you with the matter that was stolen from you, relying upon your zeal to catch the thief in case any attempt was made to pick your pocket."

"Yet you were provoked with me, sir?"

"For not recovering the envelope with the same ease that you nabbed the thief. Now, I must admit that you have splendidly acquitted yourself of any suspicion against your zeal or intelligence. Where I thought that perhaps you might catch one tricky Spaniard, you have pounced upon two, instead. But I must go now. This fellow whom you grabbed must be questioned."

"You think, then, sir, that I am still worthy of holding my commission?"

Colonel Westinghouse looked astonished.

"Do you mean to say, Maynard, that you had any doubts as to your fitness to serve in the army?"

"My doubts were so great, sir, that, had I not won my way back into your good graces, I should have resigned my commission in the army."

"You are extremely sensitive," laughed Colonel Westinghouse, but there was a

ring to his voice that showed him to be pleased with the youngster's spirit.

"Now, good-by, Maynard. As soon as I have any real work for you I shall send for you and trust you with it."

Left to himself, the boy found himself to be exhausted.

"That experience, and the worry," he reflected, "were harder on me than a week's march would have been. I reckon I'll take a cat-nap."

Removing only his shoes, he lay down upon the bed.

It was hours later when he awoke. Outside it was dusk.

"Jupiter, what a sleepy head," grumbled the boy, leaping to his feet.

Without delay, he made his toilet, then once more descended to the floor below.

There were more people about than in the day time. The negligé shirts of the day time had given way to the laundered linen affairs. Men who had been content to wear cool crash through the day time, were now in serge or broadcloth. Military officers in uniform looked twice as spruce and natty as they had a few hours ago. The women, who composed a large proportion of the hotel's population, were in brighter array, not a few of them being in décolleté evening gowns.

As Hal Maynard stood surveying the scene with pleasure, there flashed before his sight a vision that made him start and thrill with pleasure.

That vision now came toward him, the Señorita Porrero, attired in one of the most stunning dresses to be seen in all that brilliant gathering.

Her dusky neck and shoulders and plump arms of the same hue were revealed in a winsomeness of detail that made Hal throb.

Many appreciative eyes followed this prettiest girl in the room as she swept up to Hal.

"I am still alone, señor," she declared,

tapping him with her fan with the familiarity of an old friend.

"I am sorry to hear you say that," replied Hal, with an air of mock gravity.

"You know quite well, señor, that I did not mean to include you when I said that. But I have received a telegram from my cousin that she cannot return before to-morrow night."

"For which I am truly thankful," came promptly from Hal, "since I am presumptuous enough to hope that for this evening you will be content to have me look out for your comfort."

"Let us go to the veranda, señor; it is cooler there. But perhaps you, who have been so long in Cuba, find the air of Florida chilling by comparison."

Señorita Porrero laughed gaily, which led Hal, for want of a better remark, to say:

"You are very happy to-night, señorita."

"Why?"—looking up at him with her large, snapping, black eyes very wide open. "Happy because I laugh. Ah, señor, how little you know of women!"

"But surely," expostulated Hal, "you are happy. What can you have to make you otherwise?"

"I was happy, up to an hour ago, señor."

"And can anything have happened in that short time to change your spirits?"

They were now at some distance from the nearest possible eavesdropper.

Quick as a flash, the Señorita Evalina turned upon Lieutenant Maynard, gazing at him with eyes that were tremulous with anxiety.

"Señor," she cried, though in a barely audible voice, "within the hour I have heard something that I confess has made me wretched."

"News?"

"It concerns you."

"Concerns me?" repeated puzzled Hal.

"Señor," whispered the girl, tremu-

lously, after glancing all about her, "I have heard that which I must tell you at once to place you upon your guard."

"This is becoming tragic," smiled Hal, who, indifferent to danger, found pleasure in glancing down into those eyes that expressed so much interest in his welfare.

"Do not laugh at me," begged the señorita. "I have overheard that which tells me that your life is in danger!"

Second Part.

CHAPTER V.

A PLOT AND AN INTRODUCTION.

"You are quite right, señorita," quoth Hal.

"Ah! Then you believe me?"

"Yes; I am quite ready to believe that my life is in danger. That is what a man gets for going into the army in time of war."

"You are still jesting," protested the girl, mournfully. "Señor, do you think you can be serious long enough to hear what I have to tell you?"

"Certainly; and pardon my levity, señorita, if you can. I am not indifferent to death, but one who confronts it every moment soon learns that it is better to laugh than to shiver."

"I hardly dare to tell you here," whispered Evalina. "Let us take a little stroll down one of these paths. When we are certain to be out of earshot of every one, then I have something to tell you which has been bothering me."

Giving her his arm, Maynard strolled slowly along one of the walks under the luxuriant tropical foliage.

The sun was near to setting; the heat, tempered by a cool breeze, gave a sense of comfort. It needed no more than the presence of this handsome, big-eyed girl to give a tinge of romance to the walk.

There was a hint of strong drama, too. Hal, though he could not guess what revelations were coming, saw that his pretty companion was in tragic earnest.

They had gone some distance from the hotel when Señorita Porrero, turning quickly, asked:

"Señor, do you think there is any chance that we shall be overheard here?"

"I don't see what risk there is," replied the young lieutenant, unless the trunk of that tree is hollow, and conceals a foe. As the trunk isn't over five inches in diameter, I don't see how it could give shelter, even to a Spaniard."

"You will stop your jesting when you have heard what I have to say," replied the girl, swiftly, and half indignantly. "Listen, señor. I was out in another part of the grounds this afternoon. I had been sitting on one of the benches. Tiring of being there, I rose to come toward the hotel. As it happened, I stepped behind a bush, though why I did it, I could not imagine.

"Just then two men came into sight. There was no reason why I should remain hidden from them, but some inner prompting urged me to do so. They took seats on the bench I had just left. Though they spoke in undertones, every word that they uttered was distinctly audible.

"Feeling ashamed at listening to a conversation that was not intended for me, I was about to cough, come out into sight, and walk away, when I heard your name spoken. It was accompanied by an oath. Then I heard one of the men say: 'It has been settled; the meddlesome lieutenant must die. We have arranged for a man who shall decoy him out here in the grounds this evening. As he passes a certain bush, one of our men with a knife shall leap out on him and stab him through the heart. It will be quickly over, and a lieutenant of the Yankees who has done us harm shall be found

dead in the walk by the next passer-by.''

"Very cleverly planned," smiled Hal.

"Senor," cried the girl, and now her tone was thoroughly indignant, "you do not doubt me?"

"Perish such a thought," protested our hero. "But I am amused at the stupidity of the Spanish plot. It has never occurred to the rascals to wonder what I shall be doing at about the time they are engaged in knifing me."

"And what will you do?"

"I think, without boasting, I can call myself a rapid and rather straight shot. It is barely possible that, instead of myself, it will be the Spaniards who may be found dead in the walk."

It is certain that women admire men of courage. Hal found the Señorita Porrero smiling up into his face.

"Yet do not be too confident," she urged, a moment later. "It would be much better, it seems to me, to have the fellows arrested, and then there will not be the slightest danger of your being hurt."

"In one way it would certainly be better," responded Hal. "If the fellows change their plans, they would escape if I were to wait for them to assault me. Therefore, if you can point them out to me, or describe them——"

"Now, I regret, señor, that I cannot tell you what they look like. I was so badly frightened that I did not dare try to get a glimpse at their faces. But there is one way in which I can recognize them —by their voices. If I were to hear either of that pair speak, I should know him by his voice. I am so certain of that that I would swear to it."

"But, señorita, I could not think of walking you through the hotel and the grounds on such a quest."

"Do you think, señor, that I would do less than that for Juan's friend?"

"Or for myself?" suggested Hal, smiling.

"Well, then, I would go to much greater trouble to serve you on your own account," declared the señorita, looking up at him unabashed.

At that moment a step sounded on the walk close to them.

Evalina looked up, recognized the newcomer, and half-turned in order to conceal the frown that came into her face.

"I shall have to present you to this man," she murmured. "I do not like him, but I can hardly avoid the introduction."

"I will stand the ordeal for your sake, señorita," Hal cheerfully assured her.

Turning, as the other man came up, Evalina said, raising her voice:

"Señor Carmago, I present to you my friend, Mr. Maynard."

As he gave his hand to the other, Hal fancied that Carmago flushed angrily at the emphasis which Evalina put upon the two words, "my friend."

As if anxious to have no unpleasant scene, Evalina chatted lightly, Hal occasionally putting in a few words.

Carmago, however, said but little, glaring haughtily at our hero until the latter could hardly conceal his amusement.

At length Carmago raised his hat, saying:

"Señor, I shall trust to meet you again."

"Now, does he mean anything significant by that?" wondered Hal, with another feeling of amusement.

"Is he not a disagreeable fellow?" queried the girl. "Yet at one time I must admit that I rather fancied him. There was, at first, something attractive about his gloomy savagery, but it finally palled upon me, and since then I have hardly noticed him, though I think he followed me here."

"An admirer, then? I do not blame him."

"A suitor," responded the Senorita Porrefo, frankly, "but he has been wasting his time."

"Poor fellow," thought Hal, with inward commiseration. "If he has been turned down by this handsome girl, I really don't blame him for wanting to kick every fellow whom he sees in her company."

"You will take me in to supper now?" suggested the girl, with the readiness of an old friend. "As we go about, I will keep my ears on the alert for the two voices I told you about. And you will be careful, will you not, senor?"

"I will be careful, certainly, but I shall be anxious to catch the rascals, or kill them. I beg your pardon, though, for suggesting the latter," for Evalina had shuddered.

They passed into the dining-room, and, though our hero could see that his companion was listening to every voice within earshot, she made no discovery.

Supper over, the young people sauntered out on to one of the verandas, but hardly had they seated themselves, when an orderly, approaching, saluted and beckoned slightly.

"Colonel Westinghouse wants to see you at once, sir," was the orderly's message."

Excusing himself, our hero hurried up to the colonel's room, which served also as his office.

"Maynard, I want you to go over to Port Tampa. The train leaves in ten minutes. At Port Tampa you will report to Captain Corliss, who has charge of the guard, both in uniform and out of it, that watches over the twenty-three troop transports there. He has telegraphed for an officer to take charge of the guard over the steamer Decatur H. Miller, which is being loaded to-night. On the arrival of the train you will find Captain

Corliss waiting for you at the gang-plank of the Miller. He will give you your further orders."

"Shall I go in uniform, sir?"

"Decidedly not; but perhaps you had better take a change of clothing in your satchel, as I do not know how long you will be away."

Hurrying to his own room, our hero quickly slumped the desired articles into his bag.

He was about to quit the room, when there came a knock at the door.

"Ice-water, sah," announced the darky who came in in answer to his summons.

"Heaven bless you for a good thought," smiled Hal, setting down his bag long enough for a long drink of the cool beverage.

Then, picking up his bag once more, he left the room.

"Must have been red pepper in that ice-water," grimaced the boy as he walked along the corridor. "Jupiter, how hot it makes my stomach feel!"

He felt more queerly by the time that he reached the stairs, finding himself obliged to clutch at the balusters as he descended.

In the lower corridor, however, the strange feeling passed off, or, rather, gave place to a new feeling.

He now felt as if moving in a dream, but it was a comfortable, delicious sensation.

"Good-evening, senor," hailed a voice as he stopped to leave his key with the room clerk.

"Oh, good-evening," responded Maynard. He felt as if Carmago were trying to kill him with frowns, yet found it impossible to be angry with this rejected suitor.

Carmago placed himself at Hal's side. Together they strolled through the office.

Evalina was there. From a distance she sent him an inviting nod, half rising from her seat as she did so.

But Lieutenant Hal merely bowed. Then, throwing out his hand he strolled off with Carmago, arm-in-arm.

CHAPTER VI.

UNDER AN EVIL SPELL.

What had come over Hal?

He himself could not have told.

He only knew that the sense of dreaminess was increasing every instant.

He almost clung to Carmago, and that young man seemed quite content to support and guide the young American officer.

"You are going on the train?" breathed Carmago.

"Yes."

"We have just time to board it."

Carmago, then, expected to go, too?

Hal did not even wonder at this proposition. He only knew that he was glad to have the young man with him.

Little else was plain to our hero until, after walking a few yards through the grounds they came to the Port Tampa train, which on every trip backed in close to the hotel.

"There is plenty of room to-night," said Carmago. "We shall not have to stand."

They took a seat together, just before the engine bell rang and the train began slowly to move out.

It was Carmago, even, who handed the tickets to the conductor.

Hal, though he clearly observed this, felt too muddled to wonder why it was so.

There was no one else sitting very near to the young men.

Carmago, throwing his arm over the back of the seat, looked intently at the young lieutenant.

"By the way, señor," propounded the swarthy one, "do you go armed?"

"Yes," assented Hal.

"I am curious. Will you tell what kind of weapons you carry?"

"Only one, to-night."

"A revolver?"

"Yes."

"Then, since you belong to the cavalry, I suppose your weapon is one of those long-barreled six-shooters."

How did Carmago know that the youth with him belonged to the cavalry?

Hal Maynard, usually very alert, mentally, did not even think of this conundrum now.

"A long belt revolver," assented Hal. "So long, in fact, that it is a nuisance to have to carry it concealed."

"Would you mind my looking at it? I have never seen one of the American cavalry revolvers."

Without a thought of objection, Hal drew the weapon from his pocket, passing it over to his companion.

Carmago examined it closely for some moments, then coolly placed it in one of his own pockets.

Not even this peculiar conduct excited any comment in Hal's mind.

Somehow, he had come to look upon Carmago as a very excellent young man, who could not do anything that would be out of place.

Carmago was an even better fellow, in his estimation, by the time that the train drew in at Port Tampa.

The dreamy sensation had increased, also, though, in reality, in all except that which concerned his companion, our hero was fully observant.

Few people would have noticed that there was anything out of the usual in this young lieutenant who was soon to be placed in a position of great responsibility.

Right alongside of the tracks lay a long, deep canal. In this were nearly all of the twenty-three transports which, on that night, waited there for the embarkation of the advance army which was to

make the first invasion of United States troops in Cuba.

Most of the ships lay in pairs along the canal. Not more than four or five were at anchor in the bay outside.

First in the line, and next to the shore end of the canal, lay the large, handsome steamer, the Decatur H. Miller, from New York.

Carmago fell back several steps as our hero made his way to a middle-aged man standing at the steamer's after gangway plank.

"Captain Corliss?" asked our hero, saluting.

"Yes; and you are—"

"Lieutenant Maynard, from Colonel Westinghouse."

"In that case," replied the captain, "you will undoubtedly know the countersign."

Saying which he led our hero aside. Hal whispered the word in his ear.

"And this young man with you?" questioned Corliss, peering through the darkness in Carmago's direction.

Hal hesitated, until something within him prompted him to reply:

"A friend who has come with me."

"In the army?"

"No, sir."

"Is he in any branch of the government service?"

"No, sir."

"Then I have only to add that he must not be allowed aboard the vessel."

"He shall not go aboard, sir."

In low tones Captain Corliss then detailed our hero's instructions.

Hal was to remain on duty near the Miller until relieved.

As he was to be held responsible for all who went aboard, no one was to pass the guard, except those who had a regular pass signed by either Captain Corliss or our hero.

"And you will not give a pass," added the captain, "unless you are sure that

you are right in doing so. The object in stationing you here is to make sure that no one goes on the vessel who is not authorized to do so. The only exception will be that the captain of the Miller will vouch to you for any members of his crew, whom you will pass aboard upon his recommendation. Remember, lieutenant, that there will probably be attempts made by employees of Spain. If they were to get aboard one of these craft, and start a fire or an explosion, it would probably result in the quick destruction of the whole transport fleet which the government has been weeks in getting together."

"I shall be very careful, captain."

Captain Corliss then presented our hero to Corporal O'Hare, who was in command of the six privates of the guard.

"You'll have a long, tedious time of it, sir," suggested the corporal, after Captain Corliss had departed. "Better make yourself as comfortable as you can. Will you have a camp stool brought out here, sir, so you can sit in the cool night air?"

"An excellent idea," nodded Hal, adding next, as he saw Carmago approaching:

"Bring two, corporal, so that my friend can sit with me."

"Yes, sir."

In a minute or two Corporal O'Hare returned with the two camp stools.

"Sit down, my friend," invited Hal, and Carmago at once accepted.

"This is the sort of a night when one must smoke to make time pass quickly," smiled Carmago, reaching into one of his pockets for his cigarette case. "Will you join me, senor?"

"I never smoke, thank you."

"But you will find this tobacco excellent," urged the swarthy one. "Try one."

What could it mean? Though not a smoker, Hal found his last objection brushed aside. Mechanically he reached

out, took one of the cigarettes, lighted it and puffed away at it as if he enjoyed it.

"Do you not find the tobacco rather good?" suggested Carmago.

"The best I have ever smoked," voiced Hal, in which he spoke the truth, since he had never before used tobacco.

It was drowsy work there, at best. A few mechanics, engaged to make alterations, passed over the gangplank from time to time. These men were provided with Captain Corliss' passes, which they left with the corporal of the guard.

Forward, a gang of stevedores were loading supplies on the vessel. These, also, had passes, and were no cause of activity to our hero.

So a half an hour passed, without anything to do. Urged on by Carmago, our hero consumed no less than four cigarettes, and, opposed to tobacco as he was, felt that he enjoyed them.

"It is very stupid here," yawned Carmago, rising and stretching. "Senor, with your permission, I believe I will go aboard and get a glimpse at what all these workmen are doing."

"I cannot give that permission," declared Hal, but he made his objection feebly.

"Are you not in charge here?" asked Carmago, opening his eyes in evident surprise.

"Yes, but under orders."

"And you have orders to exclude me?"

"Yes."

"Why, my friend, that is rather difficult to believe. Why should I be singled out?"

"I only know that it is Captain Corliss' order," responded Maynard, but he spoke weakly, as if he did not feel capable of holding out against much opposition.

"It seems strange," mused Carmago. "I wonder if your captain took a dislike to me? Or, are you joking with me?"

"You heard what the lieutenant said, sir," broke in the corporal, crisply. "An

army officer's word is always to be relied upon."

Carmago immediately subsided, though he gave the corporal a sidelong glance that was far from friendly.

But Hal, who felt that his own will was strangely under the control of his companion, could have hugged O'Hare for the prompt manner in which he had come to his superior's relief.

Fifteen minutes more went by. Hal began to nod, until his companion broke in, laughingly:

"Senor, do you mean to go to sleep on duty?"

"I wasn't asleep," declared the young lieutenant, rousing at once and opening his eyes.

"Then tell me what Captain Corliss said."

"When?"

"Just now."

"He wasn't here. He didn't speak?" replied our hero, half questioningly.

"Now tell me that you weren't asleep!" cried Carmago, triumphantly.

Hal looked about him. Corporal O'Hare was up near the forward gangplank. Captain Corliss was not near enough to be visible.

But a third party stood by, nevertheless—a rather undersized man with a box under his left arm, who stood looking respectfully at our hero.

"What do you want?" interrogated Maynard.

"My pass to go aboard," responded the fellow.

"Who are you?"

"John Anderson."

"Your business?"

"I'm an electrician, sir, engaged to look over the ship's electric wires."

"Captain Corliss just called down to you to write out a pass for the man," added Carmago. "You were almost asleep, and that was why I called you."

"A pass?" echoed Hal. "Certainly."

It was all so natural that, wholly unsuspecting, the young lieutenant drew a pad from his pocket, wrote out the pass, and handed it over.

Raising his hand to his hat, the fellow who called himself Anderson walked over to the gangplank, where he awaited the prompt coming of the corporal.

Rouse, Hal Maynard!

Your drowsiness will soon have condemned the transport fleet!

But Hal appeared to be under an evil spell.

He was even incapable of realizing that anything was wrong with him.

And the fellow who styled himself Anderson was now aboard the ship!

CHAPTER VII.

A SIGHT TO FREEZE THE BLOOD.

"Now, don't drowse off again," laughed Carmago.

"I won't," promised Hal, submissively.

"It made me shiver to see your head nodding."

"Made you shiver. Why?"

"Because I have been told that the man in your army who goes to sleep on guard duty is shot."

"That is true," assented the boy, pulling himself together by an effort.

Just then there came a diversion. A man carrying a camera approached.

"Who is in charge here?" he asked.

"I am," replied Hal, looking up. "That is, if you refer to the guard work."

"I would like to go aboard, if there is no objection, to see some of the loading work."

"There is a strong objection," answered Hal. "It's against my orders."

"But I wanted to take some flash light pictures."

"I am afraid that is worse still, my friend. The flash light would undoubtedly be a very objectionable thing in a cargo which may contain inflammable substances."

"But if you will let me go down in the hold I will be very careful."

"Down in the hold?" echoed Carmago. "My friend, I will wager fifty dollars against one that you can't persuade the lieutenant to permit it."

"He'd lose his dollar if he bet," responded Hal, shaking his head. "My friend, I'm sorry I can't grant your request, but it would be a gross violation of my duty to permit it."

Looking rather disappointed, the photographer withdrew.

"You did just right, my friend," murmured Carmago, earnestly. "What a fool, to think he would be allowed to work a flash light in the hold of a transport!"

"Oh, I dare say he was all right," remarked Hal. "Tampa is full of photo enthusiasts. They're after all kind of war pictures, and each racks his brains to think up some subject that the other cranks won't think of."

"Is the lieutenant down there?" hailed a voice from the rail of the ship.

It was the captain of the Miller who spoke.

"Yes, I'm here," replied Hal, rising.

"Lieutenant, can I speak with you a minute?"

"Certainly."

"Take me with you," urged Carmago, also rising.

"I—I am afraid I can't," replied Hal, hesitatingly, for, under the spell that was over him he felt a strong inclination to say "yes."

"Not even when I go aboard with you?" urged Carmago.

"I—I—I hardly think it would be right."

"But you can write me a pass, and

then it will be all right, since you command the guard here."

"Ye-es, I suppose so," vouchsafed Maynard, completely under the domination, now, of that other will.

He took out the pad and prepared to write. Carmago's eyes glistened with the pleasure of success, but the captain's voice called down:

"Lieutenant, I would like to see you entirely alone, if you will oblige me to that extent."

"Of course, captain."

Returning the pad to his pocket, Hal whispered to Carmago:

"You see, it is hardly possible. Better wait here until I come back."

Saying which, Hal stepped across the gangplank, receiving and acknowledging the salute of the sentinels.

Up on the hurricane deck he found the Miller's captain pacing the deck while waiting for him.

"Come forward to my stateroom, if you please, lieutenant."

Saying which, the sea dog led the way in silence.

Not until the door had closed upon them did the commander speak.

"Lieutenant, will you excuse my asking you why you passed a man named Anderson aboard?"

"He has some business on the ship."

"I saw your pass. While it allowed Anderson to come aboard, the pass said nothing about a box which I understand he brought with him. Do you know anything about that box?"

"Nothing. I only know that Captain Corliss told me to pass the man."

"Oh, if you acted under Captain Corliss' orders there has been no mistake. Corliss is one of the most cautious men I ever met. You will excuse my asking so many questions, lieutenant, but the air is thick with talk about Spaniards who would be glad to destroy this transport fleet in order to delay getting the army to

Cuba. As commander of this vessel, I suppose I'm rather too easily scared. But if Corliss says 'O. K.,' it is 'O. K.'—depend upon it. Lieutenant, will you join me in a glass of something sociable?"

"I never drink anything, thank you, captain."

But the sea dog looked searchingly, curiously at our hero.

"Lad," he suddenly ejaculated, "what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing that I know of."

"Do you know how you look to me?"

"How?" inquired Hal, with only languid curiosity.

"Like a man in a trance. Hanged if I don't believe you are. Do you ever use opium or laudanum?"

"No, sir."

"Excuse my asking, but you look just like Chinamen I've seen who spend their nights with an opium pipe. If it weren't for your clear skin, I swear I'd believe you an opium fiend. But tell me the truth —don't you feel a little queer?"

"Yes," admitted Hal, slowly.

"I thought so. Now, my boy, I've seen more of the world than you have. I'm going to prescribe something for you."

"What?"

"Brandy."

Hal shook his head.

"The stuff would make me drunk. I'm not used to it."

"It won't make you drunk," retorted the ship's master, pouring some of the liquor from a decanter into a glass. "I'll walk the deck with you to make sure that it doesn't affect you. Now, drink."

The advice was given so peremptorily that our hero swallowed the liquor. It made him choke and sputter, but the captain eased this difficulty by passing him a sip of water to drink.

"Now, come out on deck, lad."

Slipping his arm through the young

lieutenant's, the ship's master walked back and forth with him.

"How do you feel now, lad?" came the question, after five minutes of exercise.

"A good deal different," acknowledged Hal. "Why, the night's events, up to a few minutes ago, seem something like a dream."

"I don't know what the trouble was, but you're brightening up. I can see that you're a different youngster now."

"Captain, a word with you, if you please," requested the mate, joining them.

Off went the two ship's officers, leaving Hal leaning against the rail. A battle for recollection was going on in his brain.

"Strikes me I've been mighty chummy with Carmago, a man I didn't like at first glimpse," he muttered, uneasily. "Confound it, I haven't my pistol with me. If my remembrance isn't tricky, I let that fellow put it in his pocket. I've kept him with me all evening, too, or rather, have allowed him to keep with me. I came pretty near letting him have his own way in everything. I'll go down and find him, insist on having that pistol back, and then wish him good-evening."

Hal took two steps away from the rail, halting of a sudden when struck by a new and terrible idea.

"Confound it, how do I know that Captain Corliss told me to pass that fellow Anderson aboard? I didn't hear the order. It was Carmago who told me—and I was fool enough to believe him. I'll find that fellow quicker than blazes, hold him up, and send word to Captain Corliss."

It was a different Hal, now, who stepped briskly along the deck.

His mind was clear at last. He was determined to penetrate the mystery, if mystery there was. Not a moment should

be wasted until he knew all about the man to whom he had given the pass.

But he failed to find the captain, though he explored every corner of the vessel from the main deck up where he thought that officer likely to be.

In the course of a few minutes our hero found himself at the hatchway of one of the holds.

Peering down below, he caught sight of a glinting ray of light.

This was visible only for an instant.

"Maybe the captain is down below, inspecting the vessel's cargo," cogitated the boy.

Before him a flight of steps led down into the hold. Without pausing to get a lantern, the young lieutenant groped his way down the steps until he reached the flooring of the hold.

"There's the lantern aft," discovered Maynard.

It was only a point of light, shining against the timbers overhead, for the great amount of cargo in the hold shut off the direct rays.

"I can find my way, I reckon," muttered the young lieutenant, groping his way between tiers of boxes, barrels and packing cases.

It was slow work, but the boy had the satisfaction of seeing the light grow gradually larger.

"If that's the captain moving about, he's mighty quiet," muttered Hal.

Then a sudden thrill of alarm dominated him.

"Suppose it's the fellow whom I passed aboard? What if he's up to some great mischief?"

Shivering with apprehension at the uncanny thoughts this line of conjecture conjured up, Maynard went forward now on tiptoe.

The light reflected on the overhead timbers was moving no longer. Whoever was with the lantern was plainly at a halt.

At last only a row of barrels intervened between our hero and the light.

Cautiously Hal climbed up to the top of this row.

It was none other than "Anderson" who was so busy here in this remote corner of the hold.

The box which he had carried in under his arm when going aboard he was now in the act of slipping out of sight under a tier of boxes.

"An infernal machine!" gasped the startled beholder.

Hal's horrified eyes took in the meaning of the whole scene.

The infernal machine was intended to send the soldiers of the first invasion to the bottom.

Or was the plan to immediately destroy this and the other troopships in the canal?

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CHAPTER VIII.

FOR LIFE AND HONOR.

"It's fearful!" shuddered Hal.

As the thought flashed through his mind he began to move forward.

Not more than a half a dozen bounds were needed to reach the Spanish plotter.

But this would have made noise—would have given the fellow warning.

"I've got to have him!" thrilled the young lieutenant.

He moved over the barrels with the stealth of an Indian.

It was progress at the rate of only a few feet a minute, but it did not alarm the Spaniard, who, still absorbed in his fiendish task, did not suspect that he was being observed.

Nearer went Hal.

"That will do the work!" muttered, half aloud, the object of our hero's stealth.

"Will it?"

Hal's query rang out, a clear and defiant challenge.

With a Spanish oath the fellow leaped to his feet, wheeled about, and fell into the muscular grip of his unexpected assailant.

But the Spaniard did not prove to be unprepared.

They clinched, swayed for a moment, then fell to the floor of the hold.

Neither landed on top. Locked in each other's tight embrace, they rolled and fought on the floor.

"Better give in," advised Hal, between his teeth.

"Car-r-r-r-r-r-rajo! I will eat you, you Yankee pig!" snarled the fellow, struggling harder than ever to get the mastery.

Conscious of his own muscular power, Hal had looked for an easy victory.

He was surprised to find the Spaniard an apparent match for him.

But Hal redoubled his efforts, striving to put himself quickly on top of his antagonist.

"Give up!" panted Maynard. "If you do you are a prisoner of war. But if you fight, I swear to try to kill you!"

"Bah!"

"Choose!"

"Between one death and another? Is it that, señor?" came the mocking retort.

Hal did not try to reply, but saved his breath for one supreme effort at mastery.

He had almost succeeded in placing himself atop of his antagonist, when the Spaniard unexpectedly let go with one hand.

"You're down!" gritted Maynard, getting the upper hand of the fight for an instant, and throwing his whole weight upon the fellow.

"Ps-s-s-st! We shall see!"

There was a warning flash in the air. Hal saw steel as the rascal plucked out his knife and made an ugly pass.

Hal let go with both hands, caught at the wrist, gave a tremendous yank.

"Wrench! He had the knife in his own hands now, but the effort had cost him his mastery.

Quick as a flash, the Spaniard sent him over upon his back.

"Now, señor, it is I who am on top. We shall see how quickly you will beg."

But Hal met the taunt with action, driving the captured blade with terrific force into the rascal's left arm.

Flop! Like lightning the young lieutenant followed up his advantage, rolling his weakened antagonist over.

"Knife and upper hand together, now!" gritted Hal, while the Spaniard groaned with pain.

"Stop this, señor, or it will cost both our lives," protested the enemy.

"Not mine," was the boy's jeering answer.

"Yes! both!"

"Try it!" defied Hal.

Holding the Spaniard's head with one hand, our hero pressed the point of the knife against the other's throat.

"A move, and I'll cut your throat!" grimaced Maynard.

"Señor, I admit myself beaten, but there is a terrible danger that threatens us both. The box that you saw me place—"

"Is a Spanish infernal machine."

"True, señor, but I have not told you the worst."

"Could there be anything worse than your treachery?"

Back came the Spaniard's answer, in a voice hoarse with terror.

"Señor, in another sixty seconds the machine will have exploded."

"Are you—can you be—telling the truth?" quivered Maynard, blanching.

"Señor, I swear, by my faith, that it is true. Every second that you lose now is one second nearer to the catastrophe."

The fellow's terror was too sincere for our hero to doubt him.

"It is likely, then, that we shall both

perish," quivered the young lieutenant, speaking more calmly now.

"Señor, a half a minute from now may be too late for us to save ourselves. Run, and in the name of Heaven, let me go, too."

"Do you surrender?"

"If you will permit me to escape, I shall be only too glad to run for my life."

"That won't do," declared the American, rising slowly but still keeping the point of the knife against his captive's throat. "Get upon your feet, but do not try to run, or I promise to kill you."

Quivering in every nerve, the Spaniard obeyed.

Close beside him stood Lieutenant Hal, with left arm thrown out as a buffer to prevent his foe from rushing upon him to clinch for the knife, while in his right hand, thrown back, Maynard gripped the handle of the knife, ready for an instant lunge.

"Do not let us linger here, señor, in the presence of death," begged the fellow.

"We'll soon hope to be safe," was Hal's response. "If anything happens, we'll die together. Now, for your orders. Get that box, and put it under your arm, just as you brought it aboard."

A wail of terror came from the enemy.

"I mean it," throbbed Hal.

"Your order is crazy, inhuman, señor. The thing would explode in my arms."

"You deserve that much for bringing such a contrivance aboard. But, if you are not willing to take the box out, you shall at least keep close to it."

Before the fellow could protest again, Hal had seized him by the unwounded arm, jerked him backward, and gave him a push.

Bump! The Spanish knave landed on the floor, with his back against the very merchandise that concealed the infernal machine.

"Now, you will either carry that box on deck, or you will remain where you are until I can get the corporal of the guard down here. Choose!"

An oath leaped to the Spaniard's lips, yet in the same instant he weakened.

"I will take it, senor, for it is the one chance we have for life."

Quaking like a victim of palsy, the Spaniard reached under the merchandise, recovered the box, straightened up once more.

"Senor, in the name of Heaven," he whispered, hoarsely, "do not let us dally here!"

"March, then!"

Keeping at the trembling fellow's side, Hal made his way out of that part of the hold.

As they neared the stairs leading to the deck, the Spaniard's knees were shaking with such violence that he seemed unable to walk.

"Keep on! Up with you!" ordered Hal. "If you are so afraid of the machine, why do you not make more haste to get it upon deck?"

Venting a sudden scream, Spain's spy ran swiftly up the stairs, giving our hero, who had not looked for such sudden speed, all he could do to follow.

He gained the deck, however, just behind the fleeing one.

Thump! The Spaniard paused only long enough to drop the box lightly to the deck, after which, straightening up, he made a dash for the shore side of the vessel.

"Just what you won't do!" vibrated the American boy, leaping after him.

Grip! Maynard had him by the collar, hanging on with bulldog stubbornness.

"Come back and pick up the box. Do not be so afraid. I am going to show you what to do with it."

Hal felt his enemy trembling convulsively. Despite this, however, he marched him back to where the box lay.

"Pick it up again," ordered Maynard. He was obeyed.

Something more than a dozen feet away stood one of the ship's water butts.

Propelled by Hal's hand on his collar, the Spaniard marched over to this container.

"There's water," rang Hal's voice, now cool and authoritative. "Drop the machine in."

Splash!

"I reckon we're safe now," declared the young lieutenant.

Next, raising his voice, he hailed:

"Corporal of the guard! Corporal of the guard!"

"On the way, sir," answered O'Hare's voice, and in a twinkling the corporal was on deck.

He stared in a good deal of surprise at his superior standing there, holding to the collar of a man whose left arm dripped blood.

"Corporal," commanded our hero, "go ashore at once. Carmago is still sitting where I left him?"

"He was a minute ago, sir."

"Arrest him!"

O'Hare looked thunderstruck.

"I beg your pardon, sir. Did I understand—?"

"Arrest Carmago at once. See that he does not escape."

Corporal O'Hare vanished.

A few moments later two of the soldiers marched up to take care of Hal's prisoner.

But five full minutes elapsed before the corporal returned with the news:

"That greaser is gone, sir! Vanished! Faded away!"

CHAPTER IX.

HAL THINKS QUICKLY.

"Step this way, corporal. A word in your ear."

"I'm listening, sir," replied O'Hare, as they reached the rail on the shore side.

"Send a man immediately with my compliments to Captain Corliss. Ask the captain to come here as quickly as he can. Say that I have grave reasons for sending for him, instead of going to him. But tell the soldier whom you send nothing more than that."

"I understand, sir."

Hal had now a moment's leisure to devote to his prisoner.

That Spaniard, standing passive between the two soldiers, had attempted no outcry. He preserved a sullen demeanor, not removing his glance from the seams of the deck.

"He knows just what his show for life is," reflected Hal, grimly.

"Lieutenant, what is going on here?"

It was the captain of the Miller who put the query.

Beckoning the sea-dog to come closer, Hal whispered:

"Captain, I am very much obliged to you for calling my attention to this fellow. I also thank you for forcing me to take that drink of brandy. It cleared my head."

"But you have arrested this fellow."

"For the best of reasons."

"You think him a dangerous character?"

"Rather," retorted Hal, dryly. "I caught him in the act of trying to blow up the ship."

"Great powers!" ejaculated the thunderstruck skipper. "An infernal machine?"

"Exactly," confirmed Hal.

"What became of it?"

"It was thrown into that water butt to soak. I do not believe it is dangerous now."

"Don't you take any chances of that," quivered the skipper. "The box must be water-proof. I must have it thrown overboard—as far from the ships as possible."

And the captain bounded toward the water-butts as quickly as he could.

Hal, however, reached there before him.

"Do not touch it, captain, if you please. I have sent for Captain Corliss, who will take charge."

"But I am responsible for this ship, young man."

"Not now, sir," replied Hal, calmly.

"The military have taken charge here."

"Military or no military, I'm not going to take a chance of having my vessel blown up."

"Captain, a word from me will bring the guard from below. I do not like to place a sentry over this water-butts. I accept the responsibility. If the Miller is destroyed, I will bear witness that it was not your fault."

For a moment the skipper snorted wrathfully, but he was quick to perceive the lieutenant was right.

"I hope Captain Corliss will be mighty quick to get here, though," he added.

"Be sure of that," answered a voice behind them.

The speaker was Captain Corliss, who at that moment came up the nearest companionway.

In low, hurried tones, Hal narrated what had happened.

"And you gave the fellow a pass, eh?" echoed Corliss, in a thunderstruck voice. "Merely on Carmago's word? Lieutenant, I am inclined to order you under arrest."

"You have the authority to do it, sir," replied Hal, paling, "but I beg you will not do so until I have had a chance to retrieve myself."

"I will not forget, after all," said Corliss, relenting, "that it was you who caught the scoundrel in the nick of time. I will have him rigorously treated. Nor must we lose time in getting the supposed infernal machine ashore, and as far as necessary from the transport fleet."

"Captain," urged Hal, "I ask you to relieve me from duty here for a while."

"What do you propose doing?"

"I would suggest to you, sir, that it is of prime importance to catch this Carmago."

"I agree with you. I cannot understand how you came to be so easily victimized by him in the first place."

"He exercised some strange power over me, captain. I believe that he hypnotized me."

"Come, now, that's too extraordinary," protested Corliss.

"But I believe it, sir. From the sensations I remember, I am sure of it."

"Then, in case you find Carmago, he is likely to again get the upper hand of you."

"I am absolutely certain that he will not again control me, sir, or I would not ask you to detail me to find and capture him."

"If you are so certain," was Corliss' answer, "I believe you here, and detail you to catch Carmago. Yet I must warn you that, if he were to again make a fool of you it would ruin your army prospects."

"I know that, sir. But I am not afraid to take the chances. If I find Carmago, he will become either my prisoner—or a corpse. But he has my pistol, captain."

"Confound him for a successful rascal!" vented Corliss, impatiently.

"Can I obtain another here?"

"Here, take mine, Maynard, but be mighty careful. I've owned that shooting iron for ten years. It would almost break my heart to lose it."

Hal darted ashore, intent upon finding Carmago.

"If I don't," he muttered, "I might as well get out of the army."

But he spent an hour in investigation without avail.

There was not a great amount of territory to search over. As Hal went back and forth over the ground, he several times encountered a patrol sent by Captain Corliss for the same purpose.

Finally Hal resorted to questioning the station agent.

"There has been no train out of the port since 7:55," replied that functionary.

"And the next goes—"

"At 11 P. M.—the last train of the night."

"He won't try for that," cogitated the young lieutenant. "It would be too risky. He has already left the port."

Hal glanced at his watch, the hands showing a few minutes before ten o'clock.

Next he hastened aboard the Miller. Captain Corliss was still there.

"No sight of your man?" queried the captain.

"No, sir; I have come to request your permission to take a horse and gallop to where he is."

"Where do you suppose that to be?" questioned Corliss.

Hal's answer was quick and positive:

"He is, or will be, at the Tampa Bay Hotel, sir."

"Why do you think so?"

"I am convinced that it is the present headquarters of the Spanish spies."

"And you want a horse?"

"If it is possible to get one, sir."

"You shall have mine. But suppose I telegraph headquarters to be on the lookout for the man?"

"He will not show up very publicly at the hotel, sir."

"Nevertheless, I will telegraph, and you shall have the horse here within two minutes."

Captain Corliss kept his promise.

"The telegraph won't do the job, though," muttered Hal, as he thrust one foot into the stirrup. If I don't succeed we have lost Mr. Carmago!"

Away dashed Hal at tremendous speed—a hurricane of man and horse!

CHAPTER X.

THE PLOTTERS.

Hot and dusty the young lieutenant reached the hotel grounds.

Tethering his fagged horse, he hurried into the hotel.

Scores of the hotel's guests still lingered in the parlor.

Among them was the Senorita Evalina Porrero.

"It is refreshing to see you," murmured Hal, going straight up to her and grasping the hand which she held out to him.

"Senor, are you aware that you snubbed me this evening?" cried the girl, reproachfully.

"I did not intend my conduct to be taken that way," protested our hero. "I hurried off in the line of duty. I beg you not to think badly of me for that. And now I must hurry away, for I have still one little matter of duty to attend to."

Just past the office desk our hero encountered Lieutenant Gorman.

They held a short, whispered conversation, during which the older officer nodded his head several times.

Then, going up the broad staircase, three steps at a time, Maynard presented himself at the door of Colonel Westinghouse.

That official heard our hero's report with more or less impatience.

"It is just a trifle extraordinary, Maynard, this hypnotism business."

"I know it, sir, but I still hope to prove myself right."

"At all events, you will want to catch this fellow Carmago."

"And I have great hopes of doing so."

"Youth is inclined to be hopeful," replied Westinghouse, dryly.

"But I have your permission to go ahead on the plan outlined?"

"Yes, certainly, since I confess that I cannot devise a better one myself."

Hastening down the corridor, Lieutenant Hal found Gorman pacing the hall before his door.

"Not a word until we get inside," breathed Gorman, excitedly.

Hal quickly threw the door open.

"Well," quivered the older officer in our hero's ear, "I did as you suggested. I have seen Carmago."

"I was sure he would come back," exclaimed Maynard, delight shining in his eyes.

"But the last part of your request went hard with me. I wanted to follow him down the corridor, despite your request."

"But you didn't?"

"No, for I said I wouldn't."

"There was no need to, my friend. I am confident enough of the truth of my theory to feel that I can place my hand on Senor Carmago at any time within the next quarter of an hour."

"He is the principal plotter, you think?"

"No, he is second in importance."

"And the chief plotter——?"

"I do not know his name, but I feel sure that we shall bag him, too."

"Nothing like self-confidence," smiled Gorman. "If you prove yourself right, I shall envy your clear-headedness. In this broiling climate it is hard for a fellow to realize that he has a head at all. I see that you have ice-water here. I'll avail myself of it."

Suiting action to the word, Gorman took up the pitcher, swallowing a heavy drink from it.

"That was ice water early in the evening," he laughed. "It has deteriorated somewhat since."

"We must work quickly, now," announced Hal, seating himself at the table, and picking up a pen. "Gorman, I am going to ask you to carry a message for me."

"I shall be delighted to play even the humblest part in this great drama," replied the elder lieutenant.

Hal wrote busily for a couple of minutes. After placing his communication in an envelope and sealing it, he looked up.

"Great Scott!" palpitated the startled boy. "What ails my friend?"

For a change as great as it was sudden had come over Gorman.

He sat in his chair, gazing straight ahead as if stupefied.

"Are you awake, old chap," challenged Hal. "You don't look it."

"I'm not sure," was the hesitating answer.

Hal's bewilderment increased.

"See here, Gorman, a man in your condition ought not to have a pistol."

"I believe you're right."

"Have you one?"

"Yes."

"Better give it to me."

Without a word of objection the lieutenant passed his shooting iron to Hal, whose wonderment grew every instant.

"By Jove!" muttered the younger officer. "This is worth following up. Gorman," he added aloud, "I don't think you're to be trusted with money."

"Undoubtedly not."

"Then suppose you sit down at the desk and write me an order for your next six months' pay."

"A good idea," acknowledged Gorman, rising and going over to the table.

With rapid strokes he wrote the order on the pay-master, signing his name with a flourish.

"Here's the order," said Gorman, handing it over.

"Hypnotized! Under my control!" thrilled the boy. "Gracious! he has a worse dose of it than I had."

Then Hal's glance traveled swiftly toward the water-pitcher.

"That stuff will bear examination," he murmured, stepping to where the pitcher stood.

Lifting it, our hero carried it to the closet, setting it on a shelf. Closing the door, he locked it and thrust the key into his pocket.

Gorman, though wide awake, sat looking straight ahead without paying the least attention to what was passing.

"I'll have to carry my own message," flashed Hal.

Out of the room, down the corridor and across the hotel he hurried, tapping impatiently on Westinghouse's door.

"Come in," roared the colonel.

"Colonel, I believe I am ready to make the arrest. I have come to ask you for two men."

"Sit down," directed Westinghouse, and, calling his orderly, sent him off for two soldiers.

While they were alone, Hal narrated what had happened.

"If you are at all skeptical, sir," suggested the young lieutenant, "Mr. Gorman is sitting in my room. May I suggest that you might go there and try for yourself whether Gorman has any will of his own left?"

"Are you youngsters trying some hoax on me?" demanded the colonel, fixing his piercing gaze on Hal.

"On my word of honor I am not, sir."

Westinghouse appeared satisfied.

"But about your plan of arrest, Maynard. It seems to me that you are taking a good deal for granted."

"Only the trial, sir, can show whether I am justified."

"Yet, if you make a mistake, it will be a serious one. You do not need me to tell you that Tampa is not yet under martial law. The military must not abuse their strength."

"If you forbid me to carry out my plan, sir——" began our hero, in an anxious tone.

"Oh, I don't forbid it, but I warn you that, if you make a mistake, you must shoulder the entire responsibility yourself."

"That I will cheerfully agree to, colonel."

"Well, here you are," rejoined Westinghouse, as the orderly returned to the room, followed by two rough-and-ready privates, each wearing at the belt revolvers and tenching knives.

"Lieutenant," added Westinghouse, "I would like to hear your orders to these men."

"I have no orders to give them, sir, except that they are to aid me in the arrest, and that they are not to use their weapons if the arrest can be accomplished without violence."

"Excellent," approved the colonel. "You hear, men? You are not to use your knives or pistols unless it is absolutely necessary?"

Both soldiers nodded that they comprehended.

"Attention!" voiced Hal. "Step softly. Follow me, three paces to the rear."

Along to the staircase he led them.

As they reached the steps a figure bounded up from below, a pair of arms falling about our hero, while an ecstatic voice cried:

"Hal, mi amigo! Oh, I am overjoyed!"

"Juan Ramirez?" exclaimed Hal. "My dear fellow, I am as delighted as you are—more, I believe."

"I have just arrived," whispered Juan, "on special business."

"Tell me later what you can," whispered back Hal. "For the moment I, too, am on special business. And I want you to come with me—to be right at my side. Oh, this is fortunate!"

And, without giving the astonished Juan time to understand anything, our hero marched his stalwart Cuban chum up the stairs to the next landing.

"Number 814," mused Hal, scanning the numbers on the doors nearest the landing. "Ah, now understand about where the room is."

Juan, noting how quietly the others trod, altered his step to suit the circumstances.

Comprehending from indications that something much out of the usual was on the carpet, Ramirez did not utter a word, though his snapping eyes observed every move.

"Room 794," mused Maynard, noting the number on the door they were passing. "Now I can see the door of 814."

Turning to his chum, he added, in a whisper.

"Juan, I see that you have your machete and pistol. I must tell you that

you are not to use them, unless you see my men use their weapons."

"Diablo!" was all the mystified, interested Juan replied.

"Stand here," whispered Hal, placing one of his men. "You," turning to the other, "I will post beyond the door where I intend to knock."

"Decidedly," murmured Juan to himself, "mi amigo is at his old line of business! I am a lucky dog that I arrive here just in time to see the climax."

For the Cuban had such grand faith in his old comrade that he could not have admitted that such determined preparations as these could mark anything but the approach of a successful climax.

But, at that very instant the door of 814 opened.

Carmago came out into the corridor.

Hal saw him, gave a gasp, and then darted through an open door on the other side of the corridor.

As for Carmago, he looked at the two soldiers, paled a trifle, but put on a bold front.

There not being time for him also to retreat, Juan stood looking wonderingly on.

Carmago came straight toward the soldiers, glanced at them with an assumption of courteous interest, and even went so far as to say:

"Gentlemen, my hat comes off in the presence of the glorious American uniform. I wish you God-speed and good-night!"

"Blasphemer!" uttered Hal, darting through the doorway.

"You?" faltered Carmago, his self-possession deserting him for the moment. "What do these preparations—this scene—mean?"

"You are answered," replied Hal, as the two soldiers seized the swarthy-faced man by either arm.

"But I—"

"Silence," growled one of the soldiers, placing his broad hand over the prisoner's mouth.

"Come, Juan," whispered our hero.

The whole affair had occurred with such quietness that it could not have attracted attention.

"Come, Juan," whispered Maynard,

clutching at his chum's arm, and leading him down the corridor.

They halted before the number 814.

Hal tapped on the door.

Steps sounded within, the doorknob turned, and the door opened.

On the threshold stood la Senorita Evalina Porro, looking in her negligé costume, with her hair hanging loose, ten times lovelier than Hal had seen her before.

"You, señor, and here?" she quickly demanded. Her manner was icy enough to freeze assurance.

"You will pardon me, señorita, I hope," began Hal, but Evalina cut him short by stepping back and hastily bringing the door to.

It did not close. Hal's foot interposed, prevented that.

Pushing the door open, gently, but firmly, he then followed the astounded girl into her apartment.

"I am defenceless," she said, coldly.

"Pardon me, señorita," quoth Hal. "You have a protector here. None could be better, since he is both a gentleman and a valiant officer. I refer to your cousin, Captain Juan Ramirez."

But the señorita, far from seeming delighted, appeared utterly dumfounded.

"My cousin?" voiced Juan.

His eyes fairly blazed as he looked at the shrinking girl.

"I never saw her before," he cried, denouncingly.

"You see, señorita," cried Hal, mockingly, "your cousin disowns you. But I am not surprised. I have been positive, for the last two hours, at least, that he would deny the relationship if he were to meet you."

"I cannot understand what this all means," cried the girl, her eyes filling with tears. "You both look so accusing that I fear some terrible mistake is in the air."

"No mistake at all, señorita," uttered Hal, sternly, crossing the room as his alert ears heard a slight sound in the closet. "I doubtless err, though, in addressing you as a señorita, for, if I am not mistaken, this man is—"

Hal paused long enough to throw open the closet door and yank out a man by the collar.

"Your husband!" finished Lieutenant Maynard.

Juan was looking on with open mouth, though he had the presence of mind to place himself so close to the door that the girl could not dart past him.

The fellow whom Hal now held was the same who, earlier in the day, had introduced him to Evalina.

And this present prisoner was he whom Hal suspected of being the chief plotter.

Subsequent events showed that he was right; he was correct, also, in his surmise that the pretended "senorita" was really the fellow's wife and tool.

The water that Hal and Lieutenant Gorman had drank proved to contain a potent, will-destroying drug.

Zelaya was the name under which this chief plotter was tried. Carmaga was tried with him, as was also Senor Tolanna, whom our hero had arrested during the moon, immediately following upon Zelaya's theft of the dummy package prepared to have stolen.

It was Evalina who had abstracted the envelope from Hal's pocket—the envelope entrusted to him by Colonel Westinghouse.

As for the man whom our hero had nabbed for the theft that was really committed by the young woman, he proved to be an American citizen, a traveling salesman, who, being innocent, was tremendously astonished over his arrest.

He, of course, was promptly released, with ample apologies, but Zelaya, Carmago, Tolanna and the Spaniard who had tried to blow up the steamer Decatur H. Miller, were hanged.

A part of the evidence against them came from an expert in explosives, who proved that the infernal machine was on

the point of exploding when soured in the water and soaked into a harmless condition.

Had the machine exploded in the hold of the steamer, it would have thrown over the cargo a sufficient quantity of blazing petroleum to doom the ship to flames. Closely docked as they were in the canal, all the other transports would have been in danger of destruction.

Evalina was also placed upon trial. In the opinion of the officers who composed the court-martial, however, she was but the tool of her husband, and, fearing him, had thrown all her blandishments at Hal and had concocted the story of his threatened assassination in order to more fully gain his confidence.

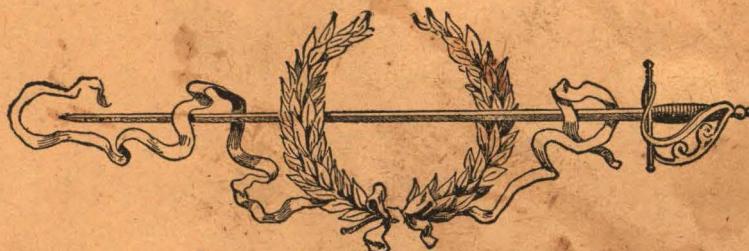
She therefore escaped with a sentence of five years' imprisonment.

By that time the war with Spain will have long been a thing of the past.

It is almost needless to add that Lieutenant Hal Maynard had added fresh laurels to his wreath of fame.

[THE END.]

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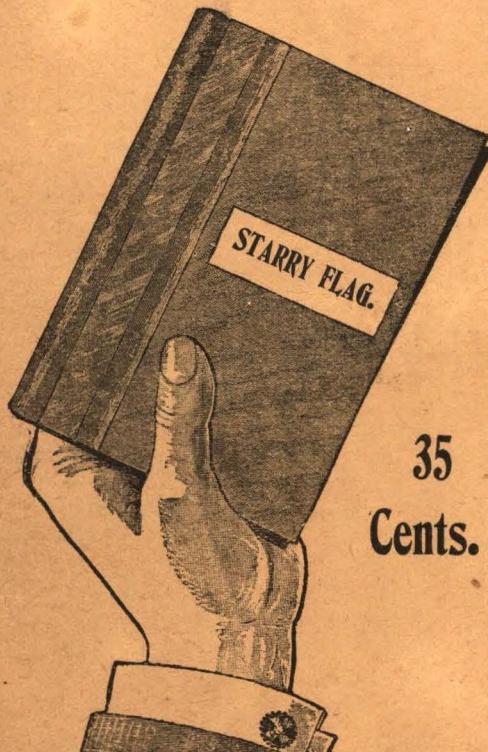
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